

WAABSHKI-MIIGWAN DRUG COURT PROGRAM'S FIRST GRADUATE ENCOURAGES OTHERS TO WALK THE RED ROAD OF SOBRIETY

By Annette VanDeCar, Communications Coordinator

As the first graduate of the Waabshki-Miigwan Drug Court Program, LTBB Tribal Citizen Will Rhymes hopes his journey to sobriety inspires others in the tribal community to overcome alcohol and drug abuse.

"In the program, we do an exercise of starting a fire with flint," Rhymes said. "It's a metaphor for sparking hope in each of us as human beings. I wanted to succeed and show people it can be done. Hopefully, people see me and say, 'I can do it, too.' I'm extremely proud to be the first graduate, but I know my journey doesn't end here. I have to work hard to maintain that fire."

Court Administrator Bernadece Kiogima, a member of the Waabshki-Miigwan Drug Court team, encouraged Rhymes to be a "role model for his people."

"Let him start the fire and let it spread to the rest of the community," Kiogima said. "He can be that spark."

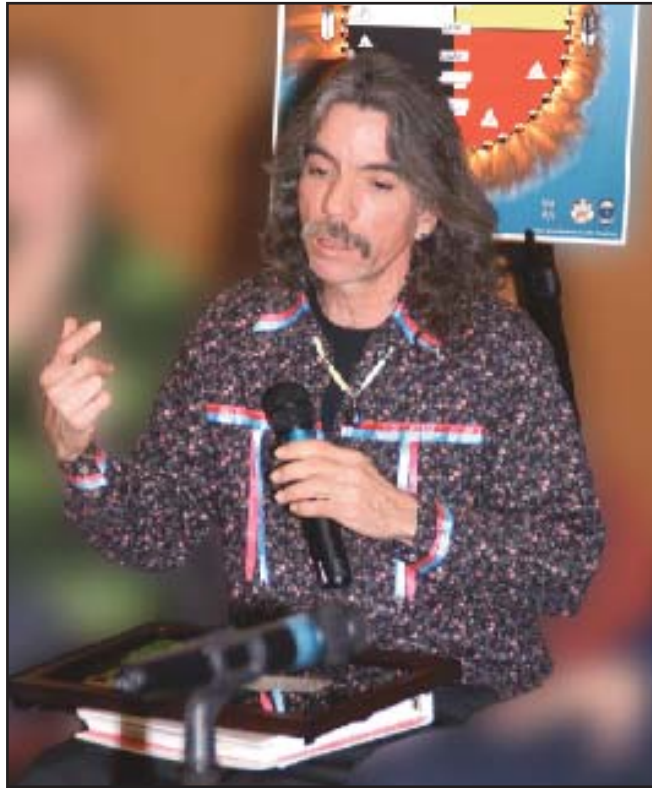
Adult Probation Officer/Odawa Adult Healing to Wellness Coordinator Joe Lucier said he felt an overwhelming sense of pride and gratitude for all of Rhymes' accomplishments while in the program.

"He didn't just go through the motions, he went above and beyond every single week," Lucier said. "I see a new person, one with hope and a purpose. All of us on the drug court team are extremely proud of him and his accomplishments."

Rhymes said he was a binge drinker on the weekends, but he had maintained 6-1/2 years of sobriety at one point.

"I had gotten away from that spirituality, and I spiraled out of control," he said. "I failed to look in here (pointing at

his heart) before. This program changed my perspective. I started to look inside and apply everything they were teaching



me.

"The thing that helped me be successful was it was a tribal program with a culturally-based curriculum. They put it in the context of the circle. You can break the circle, but you can also put it back together. It changed the way I looked at things."

Rhymes had been a company driver for 10 years, driving an 18-wheeler, but had received an OWI (operating while intoxicated) which resulted in him losing his driver's license and his job. That led him to the Emmet County 90th District Court where Emmet County 90th District Court Judge Richard W. May recommended him for the Waabshki-Miigwan Drug Court Program because Rhymes was not eligible for the 90th District Court's drug court program. In order to be eligible for the 90th District Court's drug court program, a

person must have two drunk driving offenses.

"Because of his Native heritage, my opinion was he needed more interaction, counseling and support in a drug-court setting, so I referred him to the (Waabshki-Miigwan Drug Court) Program," May said. "If someone ends up in our court and is motivated to change, my preference is to refer the person to a program such as this."

"I thought this was the best option for him because it was something more extensive than what we could provide. This program is definitely filling a need in the tribal community for Native Americans who are motivated to change their lives."

May, who has been a judge for 16 years, presided in Tribal Court along with Associate Judge Jenny Lee Kronk for Rhymes' final adult drug court hearing on January 11, 2012.

At the conclusion of the hearing, Judge Kronk discharged Rhymes from the Waabshki-Miigwan Drug Court Program after successfully completing 44 weeks of the program, and May released Rhymes from probation. It was the first time an outside judge had presided with a Tribal Court judge.

"It's great he's done so well with no problems along the way," May said. "He's embraced a positive lifestyle. As the first graduate of the program, he is a pillar in the community. He is now looked upon to maintain an example for all the graduates who come after him. He knows all the risks involved after graduation, and he will face those challenges daily."

Rhymes said he knows his graduation from the drug court program is only one part of his journey.

"On paper, it's an ending to the program and to my probation, but this is a continual process," Rhymes said. "I need

to be able to take what I learned in this program and apply those lessons on a daily basis. The real test is what I do from here.”

Rhymes said he always wanted to be a trucking owner operator, but lacked the

in Harbor Springs, MI, followed Rhymes’ graduation on January 11, 2012. Rhymes gave the opening talk and presented the Waabshki-Miigwan Drug Court Program team with an eagle feather. He received a certificate of completion and an eagle

steadily added clients from Tribal Court and the Emmet County 90th District Court since then. The program is used as a model by the Tribal Law and Policy Institute and will be featured in the institute’s 10 Key Components of Wellness Courts which will come out later this year. Lucier and Kiogima have given presentations regarding the program to other tribes.

The Waabshki-Miigwan Drug Court Program team members include Elder Yvonne Walker-Keshick, Sobriety Mentor Carla Wesaw, Cultural Resource Advisor Bill Denemy, Sr., Law Enforcement Officer Ryan Roberts, Court Administrator Bernadece Kiogima, Prosecutor Matt Lesky, Defense Dick Lewis, Adult Probation Officer/Odawa Adult Healing to Wellness Coordinator Joe Lucier, Substance Abuse Counselor Susan Yates, Mental Health Therapist Brad Houle and Associate Judge Jenny Lee Kronk.

For more in-depth information regarding the Waabshki-Miigwan Drug Court Program, please visit www.odawa-trails.com to read articles about the program or call 231-242-1474.

Photos by Communications Coordinator Annette VanDeCar.



business background to do so. He is currently enrolled at North Central Michigan College in Petoskey, MI, pursuing an Entrepreneurship certificate through the Waganakising Odawa Career and Technical Education Program (WOCTEP) and is considering pursuing an Associate’s degree in Geographic Information System (GIS). He is also taking trucking owner operator courses online.

“This program is not for everyone, but I wanted sobriety so badly, and I wanted to succeed,” Rhymes said. “If you live your life in a sober way, the sky’s the limits. There is so much opportunity here. There is a sense of pride in belonging to a nation or tribe. Considering where we came from and how the elders looked forward to the next Seven Generations, I owe it to myself and to them to continue living sober. The elders gave of their time unselfishly, and they did that in a sober way.”

Rhymes’ mother was the late Lorraine (Sharkey) Heimes, and his grandparents were the late Elizabeth (Feathers) and the late George Sharkey. He has a sister, Victoria, and a half-sister, Shirley.

A tribal community celebration and feast at the LTBB Governmental Center

feather, gifts from the Waabshki-Miigwan Drug Court Program team members and a ribbon shirt from LTBB Tribal Citizen Regina Brubacker-Carver.

Tribal Chairman Dexter McNamara gave a welcome, and LTBB Tribal Citizen Ray “Zeebee” Kiogima gave the opening prayer before the feast. LTBB Tribal Citizen Arlene Naganashe started a spontaneous giveaway. The Woodland Singers performed opening and closing songs. Odawa Fishery, Inc. donated the fish for the feast, and LTBB Tribal Citizen Beverly Wemigwase made corn soup and fry bread for the feast.

The Waabshki-Miigwan Drug Court Program started with its first client on October 20, 2012 and has

